

From activism to analysis

WASHINGTON DC

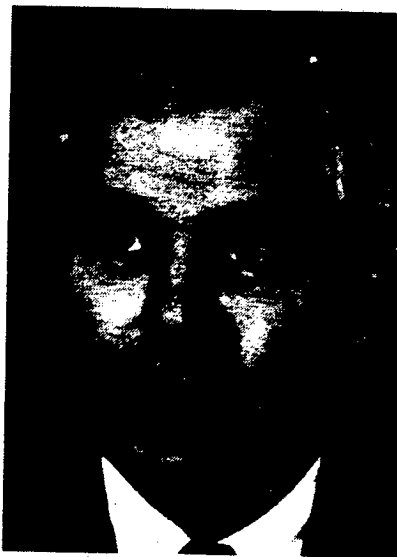
A patch of professional dullness will suit the CIA well, too. Mr William Casey, who had a cancerous tumour removed from his brain in December, resigned as director of central intelligence this week. His deputy, Mr Robert Gates, has been nominated to succeed him.

Mr Casey, who ran Mr Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign, was a man after the president's heart. He was an activist, winning money and strength for the CIA, and building up its readiness for covert operations. He created the Nicaraguan contra army, leading the CIA into a number of controversial actions, above all the 1984 mining of Nicaragua's harbours. The guerrilla campaign against the Sandinists came to be known as "Casey's war". His relations with the congressional intelligence committees were by no means his strong point.

Mr Gates may be the man to win back congressional confidence in the agency. His 20 years with the CIA (he is still only 43 years old) have nearly all been on the analytical, not the clandestine, side. A respected specialist on the Soviet Union, he is described as an ideal bureaucrat. Nothing, at this stage, could be better.

The Senate intelligence committee is expected to hurry his confirmation through. The chairman, Senator David Boren, has said that he will not use the occasion for a full-scale review of the agency's part—as shipping agent for weapons on their way to Iran and banker for the surreptitious profits from the

sale—in the Iranian affair. The senators can, however, be expected to ask Mr Gates why he did not pass on his suspicions when, early last October, he and Mr Casey first heard rumours of the contra connection. The committee may also use the hearings to ask Mr Gates one or two questions on what the CIA, and in particular a former station chief in Costa Rica, may have been up to during the years when official aid to the contras was forbidden by Congress.



Gates must build confidence